
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Submitted by: The Permit Streamlining Working Group

Finding: Permit Streamlining in Sensitive Habitats Lands

The existing system for getting permits to reduce fuels using equipment and to conduct pile burning in-on sensitive ~~habitats~~ land (e.g., stream environment zones and steep slopes) is often confusing, sometimes redundant and complex. This ~~may~~ discourages property owners and land managers from reducing fuels in these areas, and imposes unnecessary costs and delays to removing trees and vegetation. One way to improve fire protection in the Tahoe Basin is to simplify and streamline the permits needed for projects to reduce fuels on sensitive lands.

Background and Supporting Evidence:

Both Lahontan and TRPA have policies restricting equipment use in stream environment zones and steep slopes.

Fuel reduction projects involving activities within stream environment zones and steep slopes pose greater risks to water quality, sensitive soils, vegetation, fish and wildlife. The proximity of these project activities to streams, and water bodies tributary to Lake Tahoe increase the risk from ground disturbing activities of delivering greater number of fine particles to Lake Tahoe, contributing to loss of clarity.

Recommendation No. 1:

The Commission recommends funding, staff, and equipment be provided to support federal, state and non-federal efforts to plan and implement larger scale fuel reduction projects involving large areas of stream environment zones and steep slopes needing treatment, such as the USFS South Shore Fuel Reduction Project.

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – Increased funds needed to achieve fuel reduction goals ~~in-on~~ sensitive ~~habitats~~ lands of the Tahoe Basin.
- ☐ Funding source – SNPLMA ~~SNMPLA~~, state grants
- ☐ Staffing – none
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws –none affected

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – none

- ☐ Social – none
- ☐ Political –
- ☐ Policy - none
- ☐ Health and Safety – assists landowners in achieving fuel reduction goals and reducing wildfire risks.
- ☐ Environmental – assists landowners in reducing the potential for a catastrophic wild fire while ensuring environmental resources are protected.
- ☐ Interagency - none

Recommendation No. 2:

The Commission recommends fuel reduction project proponents use a risk assessment process to categorize stream environment zones based on access, soil types, channel type, and operability criteria relating to soil moisture and impacts to water quality. This risk assessment will enable quick regulatory agreement on project prescriptions for each risk type. The information will also facilitate NEPA and/or CEQA compliance, expediting work in stream environment zones by describing potential risks and addressing them systematically. The Tahoe Interagency Project Implementation Team (IPIT) should lead development of this approach and apply it to large scale fuel reduction projects involving sensitive habitats lands. As much as possible, Rely on the environmental analysis and review process as the single process to reach agreement on permit requirements and conditions.

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – upfront costs to establish protocols, long term savings in project planning.
- ☐ Funding source - none
- ☐ Staffing – existing staffing and additional staffing to support interagency coordinated planning of the IPIT.
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws – none

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – eliminates additional mitigation measures and monitoring where not warranted and focuses limited resources to mitigating only those areas posing the greatest risks to the environment
- ☐ Social – none
- ☐ Political – positive political demonstration of streamlining by public agencies.
- ☐ Policy - none
- ☐ Health and Safety – assists landowners in achieving fuel reduction objectives and reducing fire risks from sensitive habitats lands.
- ☐ Environmental –assists landowners in reducing the potential for a catastrophic wild fire while ensuring environmental resources are

protected. Focuses limited resources for mitigation and monitoring in areas posing the greatest risks to environmental resources.

- ☐ Interagency - none

Recommendation No. 3: The Commission recommends developing a set of tools or handbook of operating procedures and best management practices related to equipment use in SEZs and steep slopes and pile burning in SEZs. These tools shall be annually reviewed and revised based on new information gathered from demonstration projects. For example, a result would be to allow equipment use on slopes up to 40%. Another example would allow pile burning within a specified distance to a stream course.

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – upfront costs resulting in long term savings
- ☐ Funding source – state and federal grants and private funds
- ☐ Staffing – none
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws – none

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – facilitates operations, providing tools for implementers
- ☐ Social – none
- ☐ Political – positive political demonstration of technical assistance to facilitate fuel reduction projects by public agencies.
- ☐ Policy - none
- ☐ Health and Safety – assists landowners in reducing risks of catastrophic wildfire.
- ☐ Environmental – assists landowners in reducing the potential for a catastrophic wild fire.
- ☐ Interagency – coordination needed to share information and identify knowledge gaps.

Recommendation No. 4: For projects on the California portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Commission recommends TRPA and Lahontan grant exceptions for disturbance within SEZs for the purposes of completing fuel reduction projects (with equipment) necessary to protect public health and safety as identified in the community wildfire protection plans. The Commission recommends both regulatory boards ~~consider~~ granting blanket exemptions to a group of fuel reduction prescriptions when the tools or handbook referenced in 3c are implemented. (This could be done as part of expanded MOUs or waivers.)

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – reduces costs of individually obtaining an exception or variance from the SEZ prohibitions.
- ☐ Funding source - none
- ☐ Staffing – existing staffing to process blanket exemptions
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws – none.

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – none
- ☐ Social – none
- ☐ Political – positive political demonstration of streamlining by public agencies.
- ☐ Policy - none
- ☐ Health and Safety – assists landowners in meeting fuel reduction objectives.
- ☐ Environmental – assists landowners in reducing the risk of a catastrophic wild fire.
- ☐ Interagency - none